



FACT SHEET

Turning Point: The Changing Landscape for Women Candidates

Key research findings on women's campaigns for governor in 2010

BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW

Ten women ran for governor in 2010. Four Republican women and no Democratic women won. That leaves us today with **six women governors out of 50** governors nationwide. Throughout the history of the United States, there have been **34 women governors compared to 2,319 men**.

2010 was a turning point in the foundation's 12 years of research on women's campaigns for governor. Women candidates in 2010 still faced barriers, but they ran on a more level playing field than in past years. Likeability and gender-neutral traits such as problem-solving predicted votes rather than traits that favored men, such as toughness. In many areas, women candidates showed distinct *advantages* over their male competitors. Now more than ever, gender may be a strategic asset in women's campaigns for executive office.

KEY FINDINGS

Women candidates in 2010 ran on a more level playing field, as voters prioritized more gender-neutral traits than in past years.

- After partisanship, **likeability** has become the single most important predictor of votes for women.
- Voters wanted candidates who were **problem-solvers, had the right priorities, and were strong**. This is a change from past years, when voters sought candidate traits that favored men, such as toughness.
- A woman candidate's **biggest opportunity to show leadership** to voters is being seen as a **problem-solver**. **Women voters** rated women candidates as **more effective and better** problem-solvers than male voters did.

Voters now judge men and women equally on measures of economic competence. In the past, women candidates were at a disadvantage on economic issues.

- The economy was the most important issue for women *and* men to master in 2010. The most important ways for candidates to show economic expertise were **issuing an economic plan** and talking about **experience dealing with the economy as a public official**.

Gender can be a strategic asset for women candidates.

- Women can be **360° candidates**. By using all of their experiences and expertise women have a **broader range of opportunities to connect with voters**. In earlier election cycles women were advised not to share their personal lives, for fear that it would detract from their seriousness and electability.

ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

The Barbara Lee Family Foundation advances women's equality and representation in American politics through political research, strategic partnerships, and grants and endowments.

The foundation has studied and published non-partisan research about every woman's gubernatorial race since 1998 to analyze the relationship between gender and campaigns for executive office.

We have shared our findings with hundreds of women candidates at all levels and across parties. Our Governors Guidebook Series gives women essential knowledge and tools to meet the challenges of campaigning.

Turning Point: The Changing Landscape for Women Candidates is the newest addition to the series.

Learn more about our research and partnerships at www.barbaraleefoundation.org.

Voters still give women overall a slight advantage on honesty and ethics.

- Democratic women running against Republican men had this honesty advantage in 2010. Republican women running against Democratic men trailed.
- Knowing that women have an edge on these qualities, male opponents tried to knock women candidates off their pedestal with voters early on in campaigns by **launching negative attacks**.

Voters penalize women more than men when they believe they are engaged in negative campaigning.

- Voters see negative campaigning by a woman candidate as an indication that she is a **“typical politician.”** This eliminates any other gains she may have earned for being a woman candidate.
- Critiquing an opponent’s record, priorities or decisions without being seen as negative is an extraordinary—but necessary—challenge for women candidates and their campaign teams.

Women candidates can no longer count on greater support from younger women voters.

- Although young women (18 – 34) **said they were interested in women candidates** in 2010, that **did not predict their vote**. This is a dramatic change from a decade ago, when research indicated that high turnout among young women was a strategy to combat high turnout among voters biased against women.
- Many young women decided their vote in the last month before the election. This suggests that **campaigns should delay ads** and other paid communication targeting young women until closer to the election.
- Like all voters in 2010, **young women wanted both change and experience**.

TRENDS TO WATCH

- When voters perceive women officeholders as different from men it predicts to voting for women candidates.
- The biggest advantage for Democratic women in 2010 was education and ethics, while Republican women’s greatest advantage was on making it easier to start and run a business and creating a favorable business climate.
- Independent voters may be the key to future elections. Independent women in 2010 continued to vote more for women candidates than independent men.

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“Men are judged on their potential; women are judged on their performance.”

- Candidate

“Everybody says that they are going to do this for education and they are going to do that for small business, what are you going to do? Give me specifics.”

- Focus group participant

“[As a woman] you can be tough and policy-minded and still talk to people about your kids.”

- Campaign consultant

“I am having a hard time with [the gender thing]... When I was a little girl I don’t remember seeing a whole lot of women and so we have seen that in our lifetime. But at this point it’s a non-issue to me.”

- Focus group participant
(women ages 18 – 34)